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A regular process for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects: Global Marine Assessment International Workshop

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with paragraph 66 of resolution 58/240. It provides a factual account of the discussions which took place during the Global Marine Assessment (GMA) International Workshop, held in New York from 8 to 11 June 2004. The Workshop was convened in compliance with paragraph 64 (d) of resolution 58/240, by which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to convene, in conjunction with the fifth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (7-11 June 2004), an International Workshop with representatives from all interested parties, to further consider and review draft document A/AC.271/WP.1 on the scope, general framework and outline of GMA, peer review, secretariat, capacity-building and funding, prepared by the Group of Experts convened in compliance with paragraph 64 (a) of the resolution. The GMA International Workshop considered draft document A/AC.271/WP.1, together with comments sent by States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, as requested in paragraph 64 (b) of the aforementioned resolution, and contained in documents A/AC.271/WP.2 and Add.1, as well as other comments sent after the deadline for publication. All comments received on the draft document were made available, in extenso, on the web site of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS): www.un.org/depts/los/index.htm.

* A/59/50 and Corr.1.

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I. Introduction

1. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 agreed, in paragraph 36 (b) of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation,[1] to "establish by 2004 a regular process under the United Nations for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, both current and foreseeable, building on existing regional assessments" (Global Marine Assessment (GMA)). The General Assembly later endorsed this paragraph in paragraph 45 of its resolution 57/141 and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on modalities for the GMA (A/58/423).

2. In paragraph 64 (a) of its resolution 58/240, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to convene a group of experts comprising representatives of States, including all regional groups, and representatives from intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, including scientists and policy makers, to produce, including by possibly hiring a consultant, a draft document with details on the scope, general framework and outline of the regular process, peer review, secretariat, capacity-building and funding. The Group of Experts met from 23 to 26 March 2004 and issued a draft report contained in document A/AC.271/WP.1. In compliance with paragraph 64 (b) of the resolution, the report was transmitted by the Secretariat to States and relevant intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, scientific associations, funding mechanisms and other parties, for written comments and for indication of specific issues to be addressed in the first assessment.[2] The comments received are contained in documents A/AC.271/WP.2 and Add.1 and were posted, in extenso, on the web site of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS), including the additional comments which were sent after the deadline for publication.

3. Those documents constituted the basis for discussions at the GMA International Workshop, which was convened, in compliance with paragraph 64 (d) of resolution 58/240, to further consider and review draft document A/AC.271/WP.1.

II. GMA International Workshop

4. The GMA International Workshop was held in conjunction with the fifth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea from 8 to 11 June 2004. It was chaired by Ambassador Felipe Paolillo of Uruguay and Philip Burgess of Australia.

5. During the Workshop, David Pugh, who chaired the Group of Experts, presented an overview of the work undertaken by the experts in compliance with paragraph 64 (a) of resolution 58/240. He underlined that, in draft document A/AC.271/WP.1, the experts had attempted to outline, in a pragmatic manner, what could be the core of the GMA as they best understood it. Mr. Pugh proceeded to provide some highlights on key points of the document, namely, scope, framework of the GMA, peer review, secretariat, capacity-building and funding.

6. There was wide support for the establishment of the GMA, in accordance with paragraph 36 (b) of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, paragraph 45 of resolution 57/141, and paragraph 64 of resolution 58/240. It was noted that the

Workshop represented the first opportunity for States to discuss the practical implications of the establishment of a global marine assessment process.

7. General agreement was reached during the Workshop on the need to focus on the start-up phase and, in particular, the "Assessment of Assessments", as outlined in the report of the Group of Experts. To facilitate negotiations, the co-chairpersons established an informal open-ended group to meet for informal consultations. John Roberts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, was designated as the Coordinator of the informal consultations.

III. Informal consultations on the GMA: Coordinator's summary

8. The group met on five occasions. During the discussions, points of convergence and divergence emerged. They are reflected in the draft conclusions annexed to the present report. The text in brackets represents divergent views among States. States were clear that, without agreement on the specific points, there was no agreement to the draft conclusions as a whole.

9. There was general agreement that the point of departure for the establishment of the GMA was the World Summit on Sustainable Development mandate, as contained in paragraph 36 (b) of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and confirmed by the General Assembly in its resolutions 57/141 and 58/240.

Assessment of Assessments

10. The group discussed the "Assessment of Assessments" as the first step in the implementation of the start-up phase. The "Assessment of Assessments" would provide, inter alia, a critical appraisal of existing assessments from a variety of sources; would identify what had worked well; and would help States identify areas where quality data was available and those regions where data or institutional capacity for undertaking marine assessments needed to be improved. The discussions provided an opportunity for States to explore some of the issues raised in the report of the Group of Experts.

Task force

11. Consideration was given to the proposal for establishing a task force as a starting point for launching the "Assessment of Assessments". There was general agreement in favour of including in the task force all the relevant international organizations identified in paragraph 45 of resolution 57/141. States should also be closely associated with the work of the task force. It was emphasized that there should be no duplication. Pending issues were related to operational modalities and, in particular, membership in the task force.

Scope

12. Different views were expressed on the issue of the scope of the GMA as a whole, which had an impact on the issue of the scope of the "Assessment of Assessments".

13. Some delegations drew attention to the importance of the ecosystem approach to management, which, they suggested, meant that the GMA should address holistically all impacts on the oceans. In their view, no sector or activities should be excluded in principle from the scope of either the GMA or the preparatory phase. Other delegations drew attention to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation mandate, which placed the GMA in the context of sustainable development and therefore also suggested that it should have a comprehensive scope.

14. Other delegations suggested that the scope of the assessment should be decided by countries at the point in the process where it came to be initiated. They stressed the need for prioritization, suggesting that pollution was a key area. Other issues, such as living marine resources, were not a priority and indeed the primary responsibility for dealing with them rested with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

15. Consequently, it was concluded that there was no consensus upon which the preparatory phase of the GMA could be launched.

16. Furthermore, since the Workshop had been unable to review fully the draft document of the Group of Experts and agree on a revised draft document on the establishment of the GMA, it appeared premature to hold an intergovernmental meeting in Reykjavik, in October 2004, as mandated by the General Assembly in paragraph 64 (e) of its resolution 58/240, to finalize and adopt the draft document and thus formally establish the GMA.

IV. Conclusion of the GMA International Workshop

17. The GMA International Workshop took note of the divergent views that existed and decided to transmit to the General Assembly for consideration its report and draft conclusions.

Notes

[1] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August to 4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

[2] Correspondence dated 7 and 12 April 2004 was sent by regular mail, fax and/or e-mail to Permanent Missions to the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Annex

Draft conclusions of the GMA International Workshop*

1. The GMA International Workshop recommends that the General Assembly invite the Secretary-General to establish a[n] [inter-agency] task force to initiate and coordinate the next stage of preparatory work necessary to establish the formal Global Marine Assessment and inform States Members of the United Nations accordingly.

2. The task force should undertake three tasks necessary for the start-up phase:

(a) It should organize an Assessment of Assessments. The aim should be to:

- Assemble information about scientific assessments (including assessments covering social and economic issues) relevant to the GMA which have already been carried out under the purview of United Nations agencies and global treaty organizations, regional organizations, national Governments and, where appropriate, by other organizations, which are relevant to undertaking a regular global marine assessment
- Make a critical appraisal of those assessments, for example, by comparing methodologies, data sources and coverage, in order to identify, collate and synthesize best practices and to identify what thematic and other gaps and uncertainties exist in current scientific knowledge and assessment processes
- Assess how well those assessments have been communicated to policy makers at the national, regional and global levels;

(b) In the light of that assessment, the task force should consult with Member States of the United Nations and the relevant regional organizations to identify where the technical or scientific capacity to undertake marine assessments needs strengthening;

[The assessment of the state of living marine resources and their management falls outside the scope of the "Assessment of Assessments", unless States agree otherwise. Governments will continue to discuss the issue of its scope and will reach a decision before the GMA is established;]

[The Global Marine Assessment must be comprehensive in scope and include all aspects of the marine environment, including living marine resources and socio-economic aspects;]

(c) The task force should prepare summary information on relevant existing intergovernmental regional organizations and arrangements, and current scientific work [for possible use by States in organizing assessments for their regions].

3. In undertaking its work, the task force should conform to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly (57/141 and 58/240).

4. The task force should communicate its plans and progress to all States Members of the United Nations on a regular basis and should provide the opportunity for them to comment on and contribute to the development of the work at appropriate points.

[The task force should be assisted by a bureau consisting of "X" Member States representing all regional groups.]

[The task force should include representatives of interested Governments.]

Notes

* Points of disagreement are noted in square brackets; agreement has therefore yet to be reached on the conclusions as a whole.